Birds of Beenleigh

By Michael J Madden

Birds of Beenleigh:
confessions of an urban birder.

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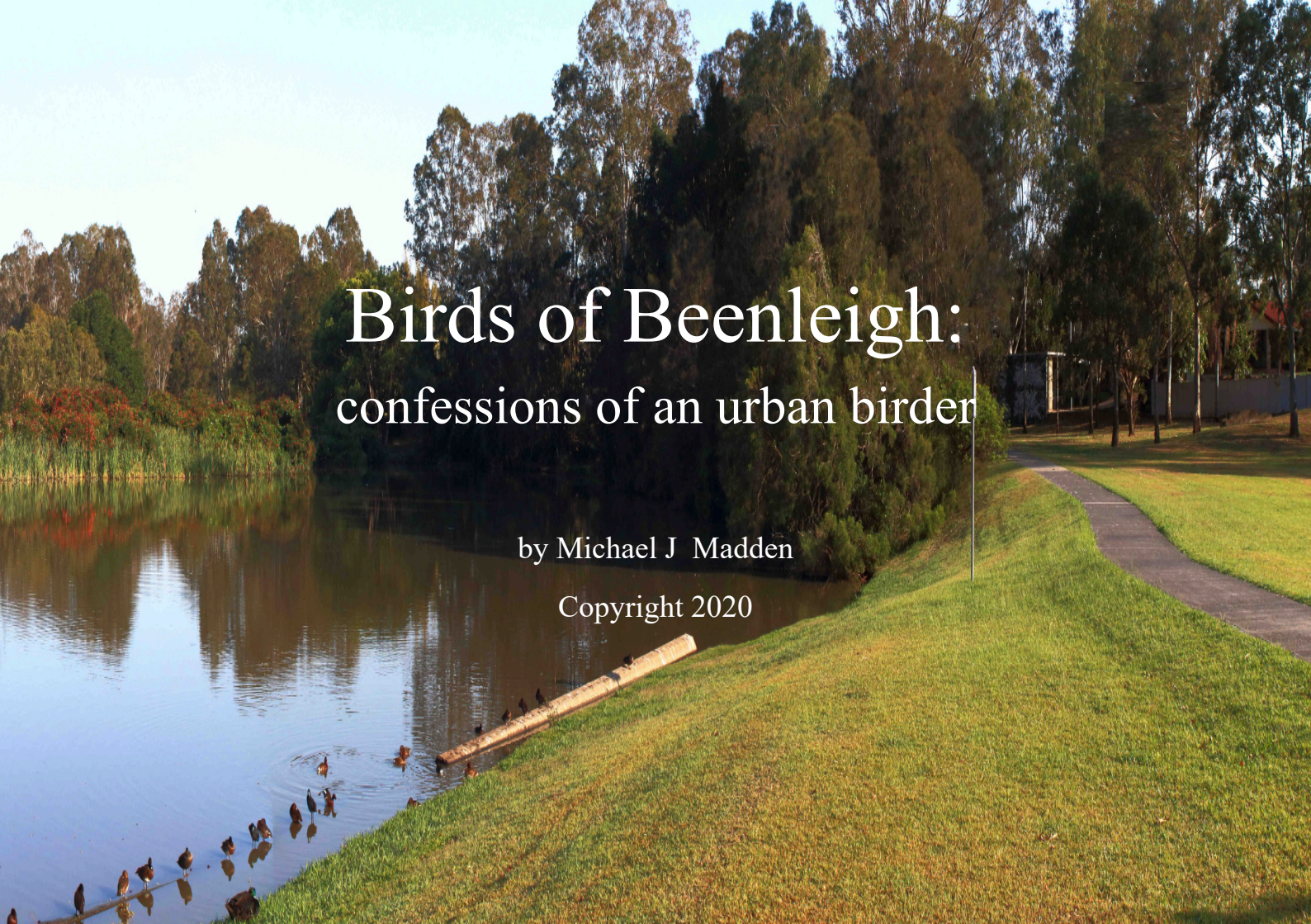
The cover image is of a female mistletoe bird. Inside cover and facing page image is a morning view of the pond in Doug Larsen Park.

Michael John Madden



Birds of Beenleigh:

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I confess it. I am an urban birder.

This means that I am not the sort of birder who creeps through the wild underbrush of trackless forests in search of rare species of birds, nor do I wade neck deep in murky swamps to get close and personal with pink-eared ducks. I am quite the opposite.

I refuse to go beyond the beaten track. Unless the grass is mown and there are concrete paths (or at least wooden duckboards), I will not go there. If the birds will not come to me, I will not go to them.

But this is why I am a happy birder. I live close to a park. A park that is regularly mown. A park that has concrete paths. More than this, it has a waterway and a pond. The birds do come to me ... everyday.

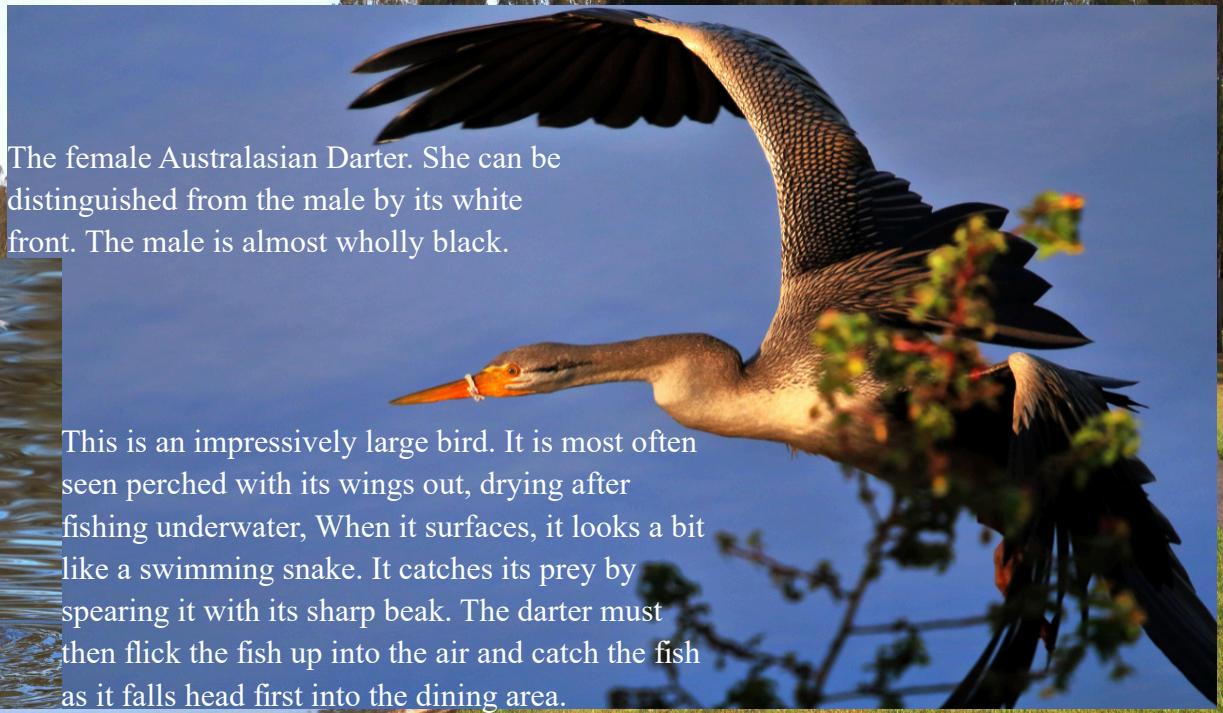
Some people have to travel many kilometres to see what I simply have to fall out of bed to see. I only have to walk a couple of hundred metres to see and photograph all sorts of interesting creatures -- and most of them have feathers.

The strange thing to me is that I've lived near this park for 20 years, and it is only in the last four that I've noticed the birds. Oh, I knew about the ducks, but that was only because we could amuse the kids by feeding them (I now know that bread is bad for ducks; I didn't then.)

Ukulele playing brought the birds to my attention. I'd bought a little video camera to record my playing. Just by chance, the first thing I filmed was a lorikeet in a date palm. I thought, 'There are birds here?"

In fact, I have counted around 80 different types of bird that frequent, or just pass over, the pond near my home -- five types of duck!

In this book I share some of my pictures of these accidental acquaintances.



The female Australasian Darter. She can be distinguished from the male by its white front. The male is almost wholly black.

This is an impressively large bird. It is most often seen perched with its wings out, drying after fishing underwater, When it surfaces, it looks a bit like a swimming snake. It catches its prey by spearing it with its sharp beak. The darter must then flick the fish up into the air and catch the fish as it falls head first into the dining area.

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The Australian Hobby is a small raptor that has a big attitude. I saw this one chasing breakfast among 150 corellas. I did not see a corella taken, but it was not because the Hobby didn't try its best.

The Australian Ibis, aka dump chook, is everywhere.

Despite its poor reputation, and its usually business-like style of flying, it can also soar like an eagle.

In a less majestic fashion, this one has taken off with someone's picnic lunch.

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The Australian Pelican is the largest bird I've found in the park. Sometimes there are over twenty of these birds fishing together. More usually, there are four or five of these birds to be found in or around the pond.

The Australian Reed Warbler is a rare find (for me). I saw this little fellow in the long grass within 400 metres of the pond. Just to be clear, the bird was in the long grass; I was on the mown grass.

The Australian Wood Duck is a regular visitor to the pond. I've seen several broods of ducklings raised in the last few years. The females have white eye stripes. Their 'quack' sounds a bit like a cat meowing.

The Azure Kingfisher is a pocket rocket. This little bird lives up to its name. I rarely see it dive for a fish and come up empty beaked.

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I've only rarely sighted the Bar-Shouldered Dove. It has brass coloured patches of feathers on its back and wings, with black stripes through them.

The Black-Faced Cuckoo Shrike, I am told, is neither a Cuckoo nor a Shrike. It does, however, have a black face.

The Black Kite rarely comes close enough for a clear photograph. One morning, six of them circled me slowly for a few minutes. The light was not good, so they probably thought that I was a large mouse. Sadly, this was my best shot.

The Black Shouldered Kite has stunning orange eyes, which it uses to good effect. This one has caught a rat, or a young possum for lunch.

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This Black Swan is having a stretch, and infringing upon the personal space of a number of fellow park visitors.

This is the Blue-Faced Honeyeater. The blue eye patch is green in juvenile birds.

I used to be able to set my watch by a Brahminy Kite. It would fly past the pedestrian bridge that crosses the Logan river. Most afternoons, around 4:30pm, it came over looking for whom it may devour.

I couldn’t help it. I just had to put in two pictures of this bird.

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This is a Brown Goshawk. It is sometimes confused with the Collared Sparrow-Hawk. This is one serious bird-eating bird.

This Butcher Bird (grey) was quite unconcerned with my attention. In their minds, they are alpha predators.

Their name comes from their practice of displaying their kills as if in a butcher’s shop.

This is the Channel Billed Cuckoo. They lay their eggs, when they can, in the nests of Crows or Magpies.

They have blood red eyes and scream like banshees. This they do far too early in the morning.

These serious individuals are Chestnut-Breasted Mannikins. They rarely let you come close for a photo.

20

The Common Coot has the uncommon ability to run across the top of the pond.

I used to refer to the Crested Pigeon as the bird with the squeaky wings because of the sound it makes on take-off. It appears to be grey at a distance, but it turns to rainbow colours on close examination.

Where would Australia be without the Crow? Not only do they clean up after us, they also help chase away raptors.

The Currawong is an imposing bird with a distinctive call. Highly intelligent (as are the crow and magpie), they are not to be triffled with.

I had thought that the Dollar Bird was a quiet, placid sort of creature. That was until I followed it as it leapt from branch to branch high in a gumtree. It took exception to my interest and dived at me. Its name comes from the large white spot that is under each of its wings.

The Double-Barred Finch is an attractive little bird. I've seen them a number of times around Beenleigh, but I've been unsuccessful in getting a clear photograph of one locally (see inset)

I took the main photo while visiting friends in Kingaroy.

Here is the reclusive ‘Storm Bird’, or the Eastern Koel. The male, as you can see, is jet black with impressive red eyes. The female is brown with snazzy yellow flecks.

The Eastern Thornbill has its name for obvious reasons -- where it is found (eastern Australia) and its beak!

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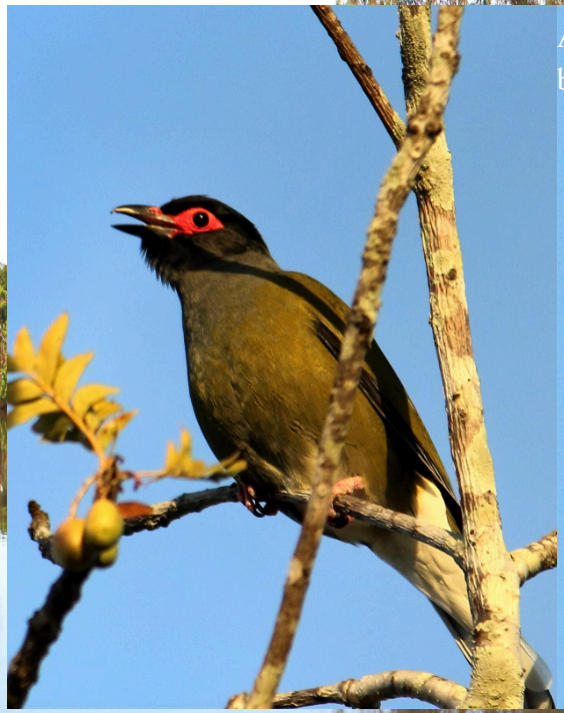

A male and female Figbird,
both high in a tree.

To find and photograph this Forest Kingfisher I had to drive 5km from home. The grass was still mown; there were still concrete paths.

30

This Gallah was snapped in the same area as the Forest Kingfisher.

A mob of Glossy Ibis skim
over some swampy land.

32

The Golden-Headed Cisticola is a rare find in my end of the world. I spied this one morning. It brightened my day.

The Great Egret is a large elegant bird.

The Grey Fantail is an agile bug catcher. I've photographed a lot of empty twigs trying to capture a picture of this bird.

This Kookaburra is on a hurry to somewhere. They usually fly straight and quickly between trees.

The Lewin's Honeyeater is was an unexpected find near the park. I heard it before I saw it and knew it was something different.

It is larger than the Brown Honeyeater, and it has a yellow half-moon behind its eyes.

The Little Black Cormorant has wonderful teal-coloured eyes.

The Little Brown Honeyeater has a canary-like song.

Little Corellas travel in large groups, and they are always yelling at one another. I've seen at least 150 of these birds circling the park.

40

This is the Little Egret, which means it is the smallest of the egrets.

Light bends as it moves from water to air, making fish appear to be where they are not, but egrets still know where to strike. If the fish doesn’t move, the egret would have nearly 100% success in catching them.

The Little Grassbird is a shy but noisy fellow. I often hear the bird before I see it, and I often see it simply because it is flying away from me.

The Little Pied Cormorant is not as common in the park as the Little Black Cormorant, so any appearance of it is welcome.

The Magpie is famous for its assertive, territorial attitude.

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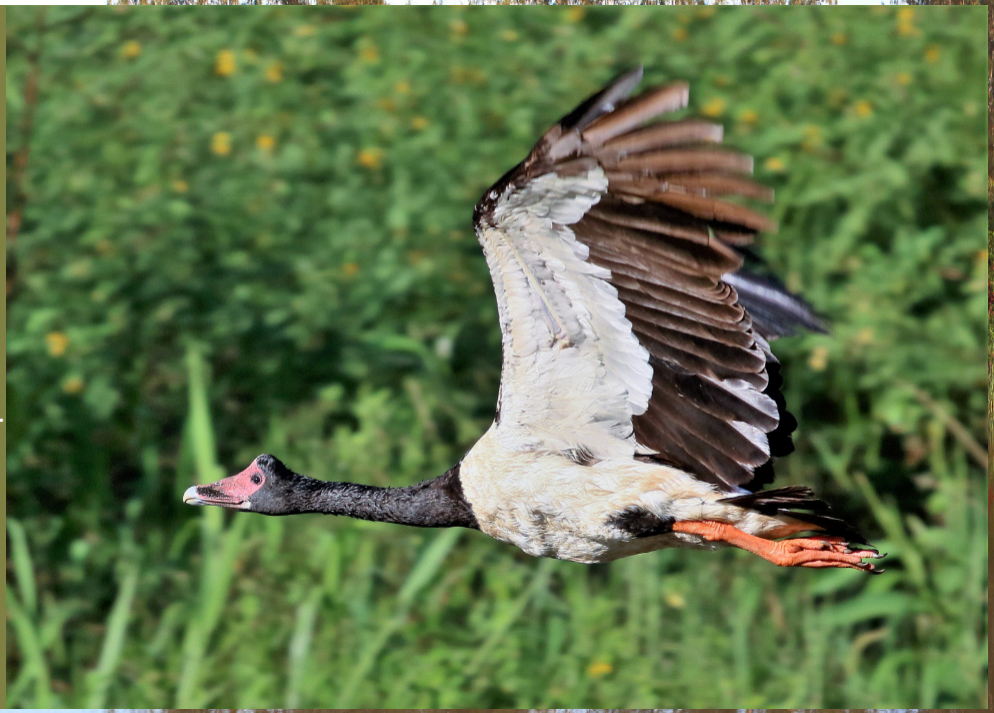
The Magpie Goose is a big bird. They have been observed asserting their prerogative (as such) by pushing their way into their preferred place in the pond. I've only seen a gosling once. It has a face only a parent could love.



This is a Medium Egret, which means it is not Great but not Little.

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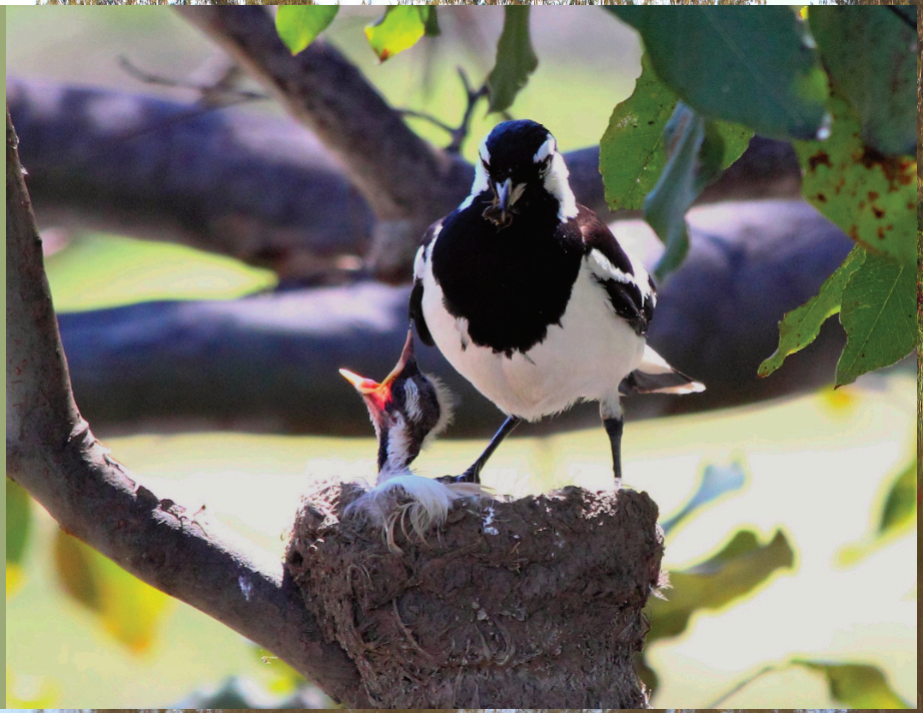
This Moorhen is floating an egg across the pond. It is not a Moorhen egg. It was stolen and subsequently eaten by this Moorhen.

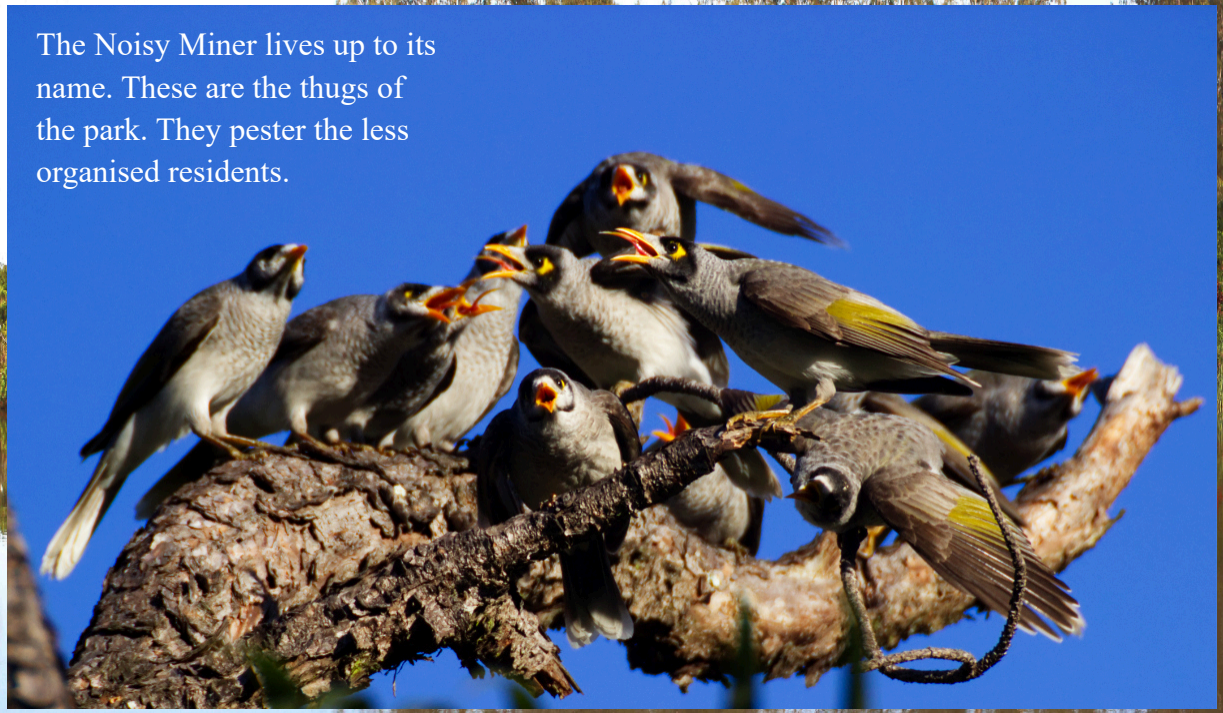
The Mud Lark received its name from the material it uses to build its nests.

The same nest is often renovated for use in subsequent years.



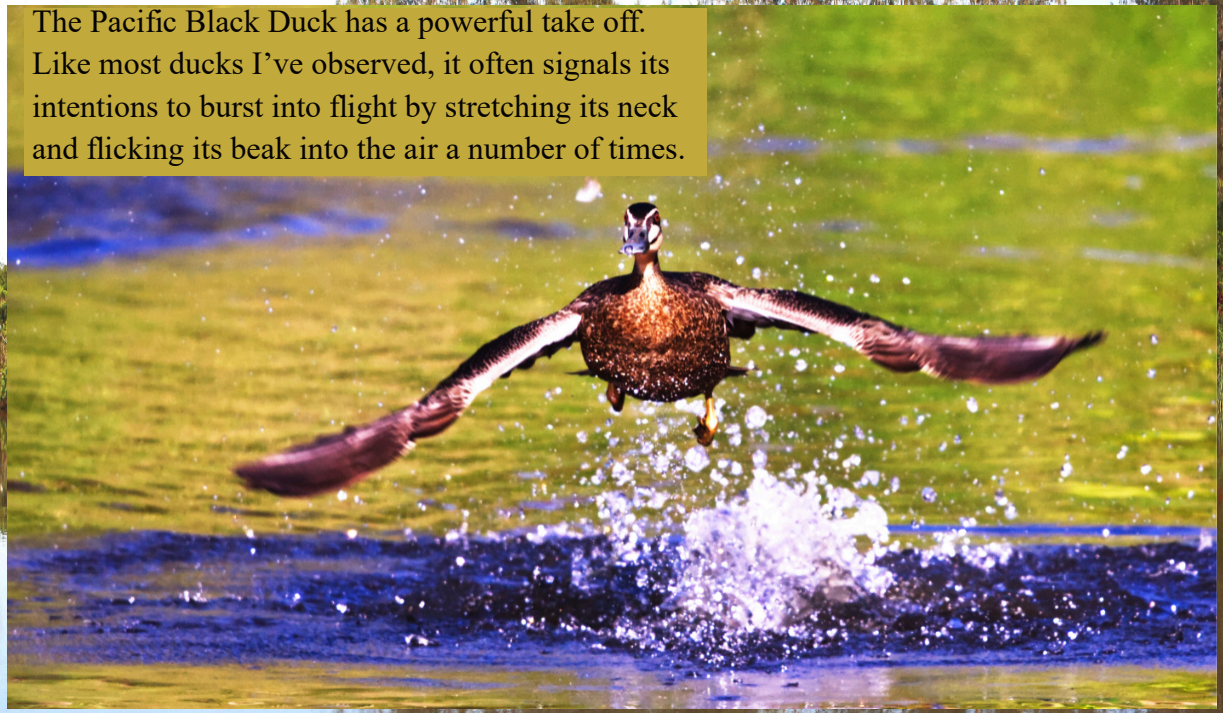
This is a Night Heron. They rarely show themselves.

The Noisy Miner lives up to its name. These are the thugs of the park. They pester the less organised residents.

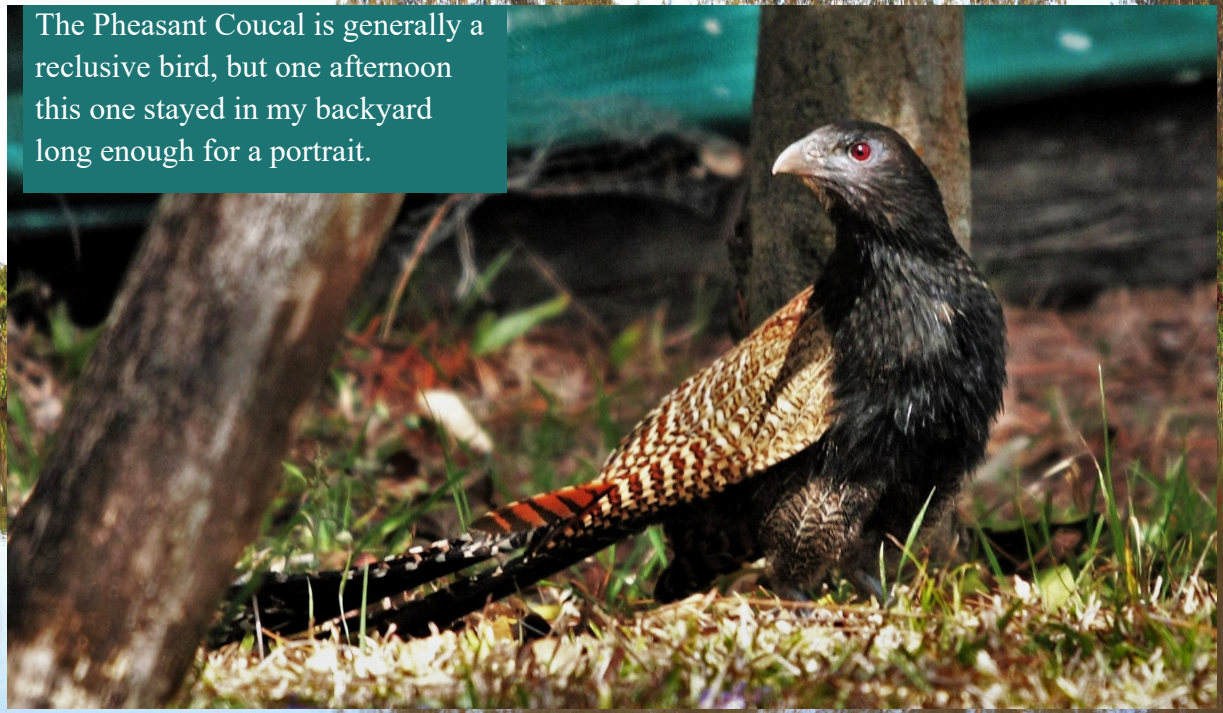


The Olive-Backed Oriole is about the same size as the Magpie. It is not a timid bird, and this one stood its perch and let me take several photographs of it. Its call sounds like it is saying “oriole”.

The Pacific Black Duck has a powerful take off. Like most ducks I've observed, it often signals its intentions to burst into flight by stretching its neck and flicking its beak into the air a number of times.



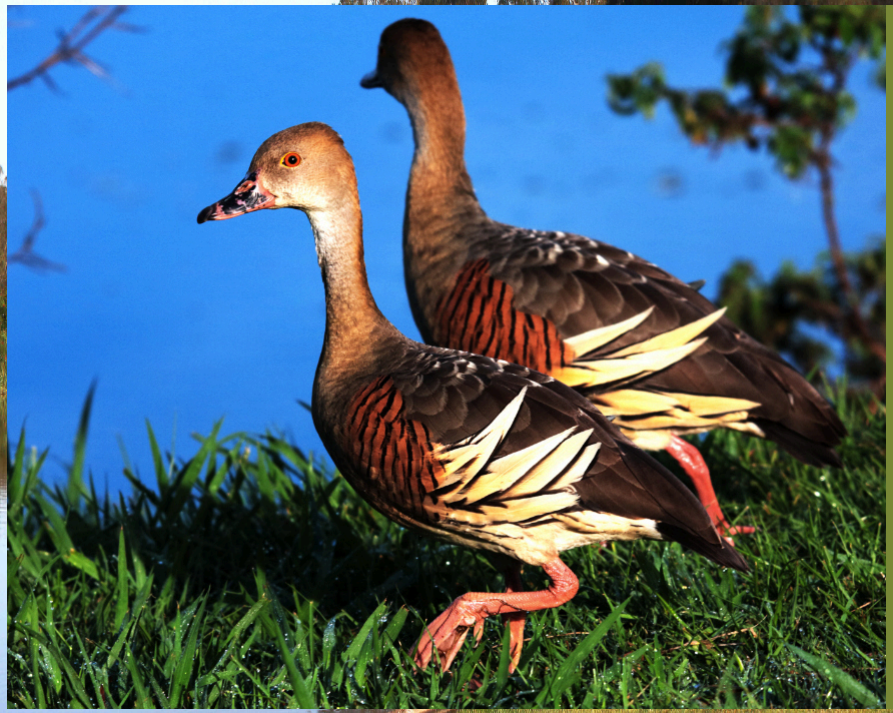
The Pale-Headed Rosella is a timid bird. It was only because of these tasty berries that I got this photograph.



The Pheasant Coucal is generally a reclusive bird, but one afternoon this one stayed in my backyard long enough for a portrait.

The Pink-Eared Duck is not often seen in these parts. These two were working together, circling a food source

The Plover (Lapwing) has an intimidating call. Note the even more intimidating spurs mid-wing.

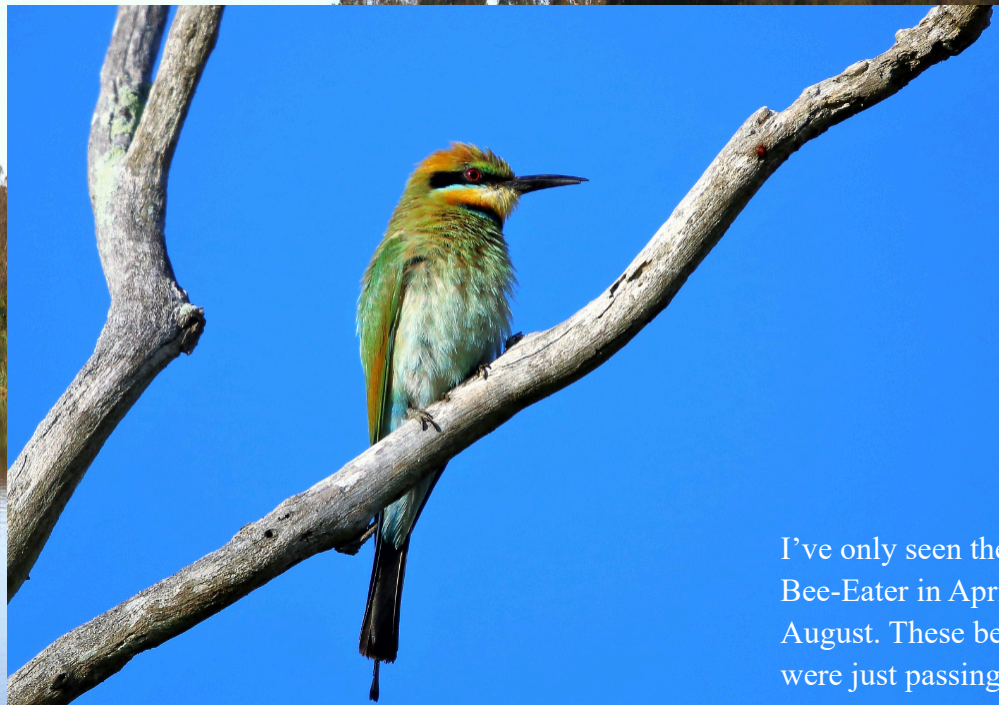


The Plumed Whistling Duck has an ostentatious costume. I first saw this type of duck on 7 March 2018.

Two flew in that afternoon, had a look around the pond, and then flew away. These scouts spread the word, and more came. These ducks don't quack; they sort of whistle.

The Purple Swamp Hen is like, but larger than, the Moorhen and the Common Coot. They can often be seen skimming over the pond from one side to the other. Then, some minutes later, they skim back again.

One or two of them think that they are ducks, and take to the air for some real flying.



I’ve only seen the Rainbow Bee-Eater in April and August. These beautiful birds were just passing through.

60

The Rainbow Lorikeet is a noisy bird with a reckless flying style. It is also beautiful.

The Red-Backed Fairy Wren is the smallest and most timid of the Fariy Wrens that I've seen.

The Red Browed Finch is a small bird that moves in large groups. I have seen one of these finches with an orange rather than a red mask.

The Rufus Whistler is well named. It has a sweet call, but the bird is a rare find around here.

64

The Sacred Kingfisher has a larger wingspan than the Azure Kingfisher and has a more robust looking beak.

When I first saw this particular bird, I thought that it was a dry leaf, but the leaf was in the wrong place on the branch.

The Scaly Lorikeet is just as noisy and reckless as the Rainbow Lorikeet. There are just not as many of them (as I see it) in the park.

I have seen up to six Scrub Turkeys in the park at one time.

They are not a small bird, but they often bear the wrath of Noisy Miners with marvelous resignation.

I've only seen a Scarlet Honeyeater twice in four years.

Both times it kept its distance, but it stands out because of its colouring.

This bird was seen in the Eagleby wetlands (a five kilometre drive from Doug Larsen Park).

68

The Silver Eye has a white eye circle, from which comes its name. They usually travel in large groups.

The Spangled Drongo is nobody's fool. This is an expert bug catcher and a most acrobatic flyer.

The Spoonbill (or Royal Spoonbill) looks a bit like an Ibis from a distance, but, on closer examination, its beak removes all doubt. The Spoonbill's bill looks like a spoon, which it uses to stir up the mud on the edges of ponds to uncover food.

Can you guess why this bird is called the Spotted Dove?

This is a Stilt. I suspect is got its inelegant name from its very elegant pink legs.

I've seen these birds more often at the beach (which is saying something, because I'm not often at the beach), but they do turn up at the park from time to time.

The Straw Necked Ibis is yet another variation on the theme of Ibis. There must be a few around, but they are just not as in-your-face as the White Ibis.

The Striatetd Heron was a nice discovery for me. I saw the squat little bird on a bridge railing near the pond and took a number of photos. Great, I thought, a new bird. And then the thing stretched out its neck! This heron has a retractable neck which it uses to spear its prey.

The Striated Pardalote is as brave as any bird I've seen, even though it is tiny.

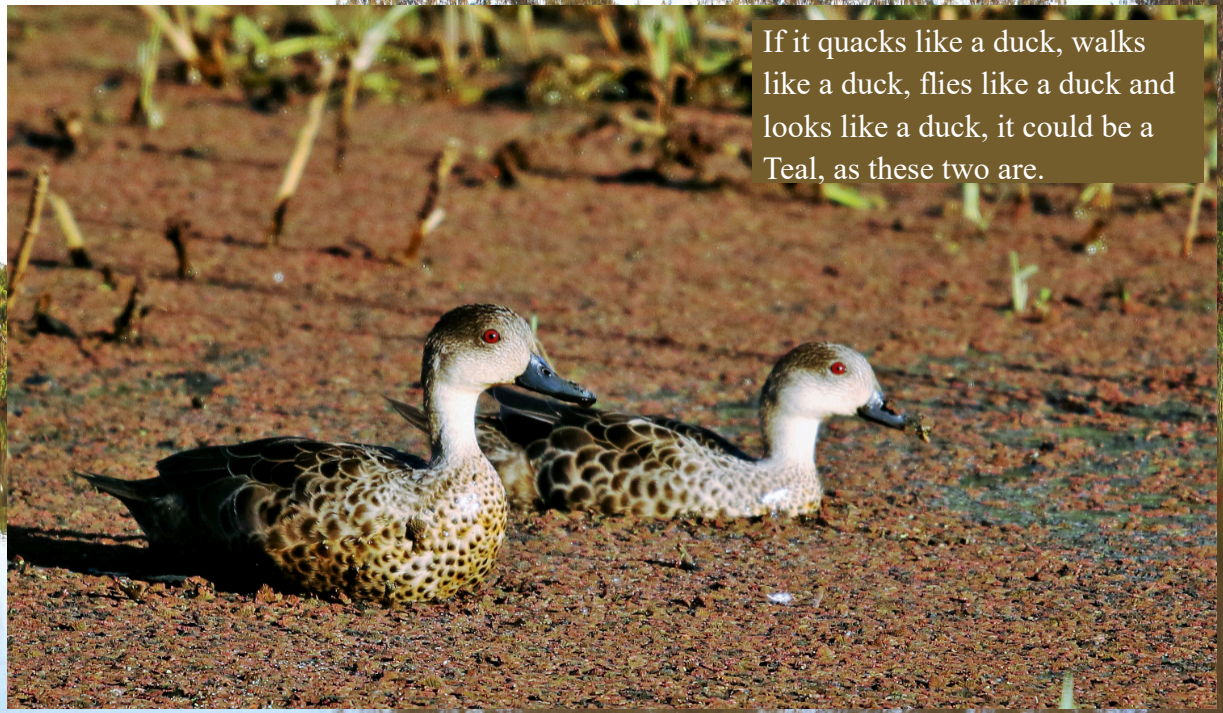
This particular bird was at the Eagleby Wetlands. It came to my notice when it charged at me.

I suspect that it wanted to distract me (or for me to eat it) while its partner and the kids escaped.

You can know these birds are about by their Pip Pip Pip call.

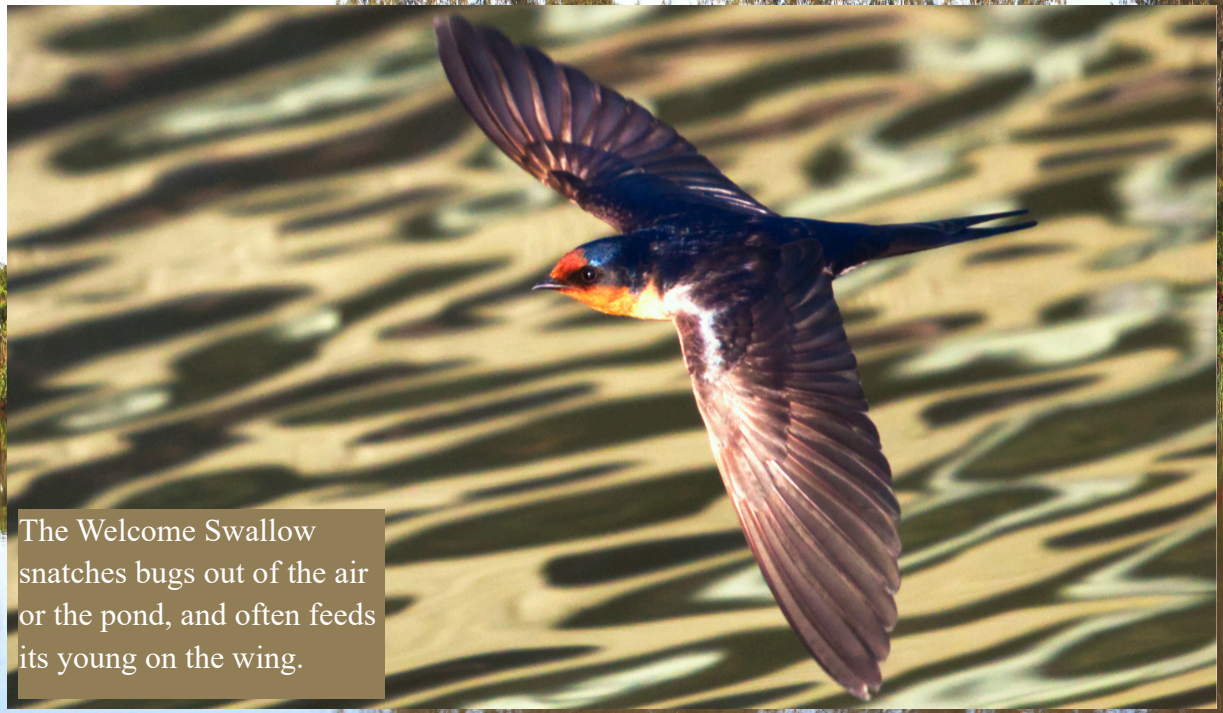
The male Superb Fairy Wen lives up to its name only during breeding season. After it finds a mate, it becomes scruffy, loses its colour and become just a little brown bird with a long blue tail. The females are little brown birds, with long blue tails, but they do have red colouring around their eyes.

The female Superb Fairy Wren



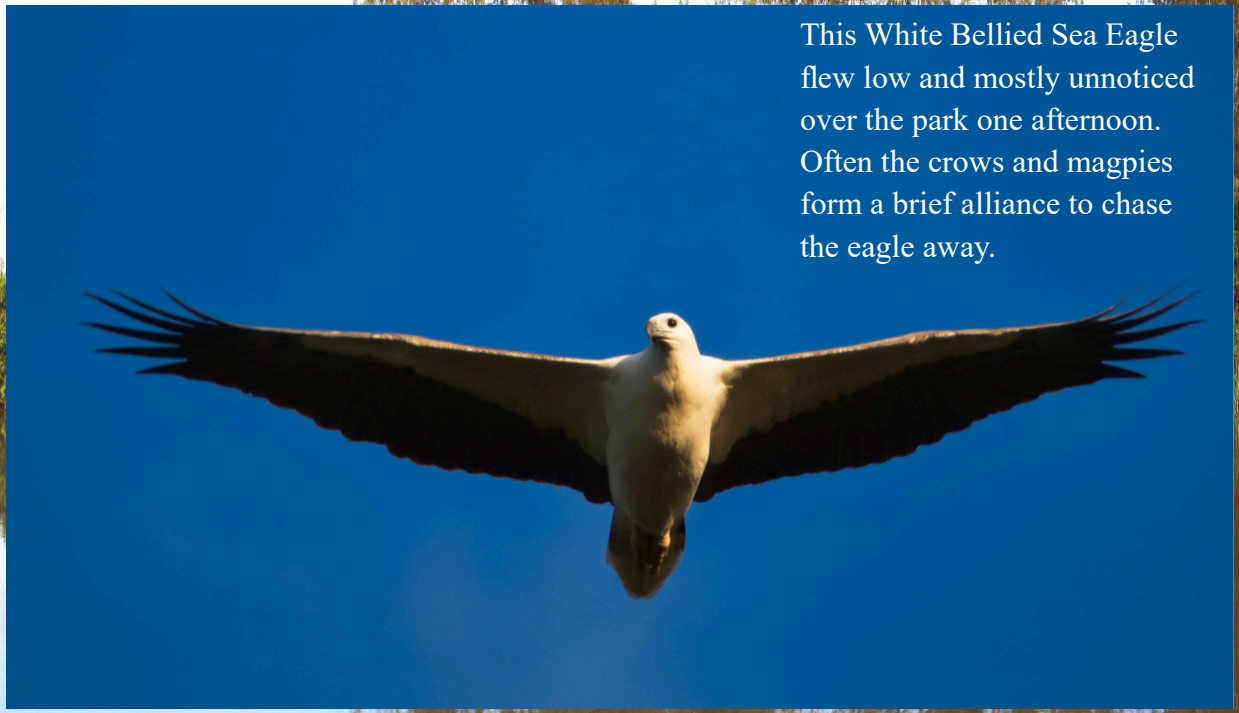
If it quacks like a duck, walks like a duck, flies like a duck and looks like a duck, it could be a Teal, as these two are.

The male Variegated Fairy Wren is a multi-coloured affair. Really quite impressive.



The Welcome Swallow snatches bugs out of the air or the pond, and often feeds its young on the wing.

This Whistling Kite was photographed over the Eagleby Wetlands.



This White Bellied Sea Eagle flew low and mostly unnoticed over the park one afternoon. Often the crows and magpies form a brief alliance to chase the eagle away.

The White-Faced Heron was the first bird I photographed in the park after I had upgraded from the video camera to a secondhand Canon 600D. Nice bird.

84

I've only spotted the White-Necked Heron twice, and this photograph is from the first occasion. It was a gloomy day.

This is Willy Wagtail executing a lightning-fast righthand turn. This is another acrobatic bird who eats bugs for a living.

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About the author...

Michael Madden lives in the town of Beenleigh, Queensland. His interest in birds developed from his interest in photography, which was rekindled by his interest in playing the ukulele. Michael's day job is vaguely associated with education.